

#### An Awful Disaster.

A little after 4 o'clock on Monday afternoon an accident occurred in South Wilkes-Barre Colliery, No. 3, of the Lehigh & Wilkes-Barre Coal Company.

When people residing in the vicinity saw great clouds of black smoke rising from the air shaft, the more experienced of them knew that something was wrong below, and it soon became known that a tunnel, starting a few hundred feet from the bottom of number 3 shaft and running quite a distance, had been set on fire by an explosion of gas. Eight men were known to be working about three thousand feet beyond. Their names are as follows:

Thomas McDonnell, aged 20, single, lives on Spring street.

Frank Cull, aged 55, married, wife and five children, Jones street.

Hugh Dugan, aged 34, married, Jones street.

Thomas Jameson, aged 19, single, Jones street.

Thomas Williamson, aged 32, married, wife and four children, corner Mills and Brown street.

Michael Ferry, aged 28, single, Stanton street.

James O'Donnell, aged 32, married, three children.

John McNelis, aged 34, single, Brewery Hill.

As soon as the fire was discovered efforts were promptly made to rescue those endangered.

The mine officials quickly gathered and consulted what was best to be done, their discussions culminating in the formation of a rescuing party to go down the Stanton shaft, the results of which are detailed below. The fire was caused by gas under a blower in the tunnel, being ignited by the flames of a lamp carried by a boy named Jameson. This lad, who seems to have been cast in a heroic mould, was driving his mules through the tunnel about a half an hour after the men working in the chambers beyond, when the lamp set fire to the gas. He had presence of mind to notify others in the vicinity of the occurrence, after which, he rushed forward to inform the men of their danger. It would seem that after this he turned to save himself, but unquestionably met his fate somewhere along the smoke and gas filled gangway.

The close proximity of the mine to the heart of the city, made it the occasion of an early pilgrimage of curious hundreds who thronged the streets leading to South Wilkes-Barre mine, and soon crowded the spaces about the shaft at the surface. The stopping of work at the Stanton and other nearby collieries, had the effect of augmenting the gossiping groups until, by nine o'clock, thousands of people wandered idly about the mines, waiting anxiously for any news that might be brought up from the subterranean depths, as to the fate of the unfortunate men hemmed in by fire and death dealing gases.

About the homes of the imprisoned men sympathizing neighbors gathered, tendering their generous sympathies, and by every art endeavoring to assuage the grief-stricken wives and children by the utterance of hopeful possibilities. But the sorrow-laden hearts anticipated only the worst, and it was pitiful to see them move about holding their heads in their hands, and pacing anxiously over the floor with the frozen look of desperate grief upon their faces. Mothers glanced tearfully at slumbering infants, or caught up those just old enough to partially comprehend what had befallen them, endeavoring to quiet their fears with stories of hope which they could not believe themselves. It was indeed a terrible sight to view and one which moved the stoutest heart. Only those who have had a like experience can fully understand the terror of such an event as that which occurred in the South Wilkes-Barre mine on Monday.

The first rescuing party, headed by Superintendent Scott, Mine Inspector Williams, District Superintendent Morgan R. Morgan, Mine Foreman Thomas, of the Stanton colliery, and Mine Foreman Ford, of the Hollenback, went down the Stanton at half-past 10 o'clock at night. It was a dangerous and doubtful undertaking. The distance from the foot of the Stanton mine to the point where the men were at work in the South Wilkes-Barre colliery is 3,300 feet, or about five-eighths of a mile. Starting at a depth of nine hundred feet at the Stanton, the gangway ascends in that distance three hundred feet, until it reaches the level of No. 3 working of the South Wilkes-Barre mine, which is six hundred feet below the surface. Up this incline the sturdy band of rescuers made their way, not knowing at what moment a supplementary explosion in the devious pathway beyond them might occur, sending back upon them floods of death dealing smoke and gas. This party progressed to a point beyond which they could not go owing to the intense heat. It was then decided to retreat, as to go on was an impossibility. They returned and gave orders to start up the air fan of the Stanton at the highest rate of speed, the purpose being to drive air enough down the gangway to cool off the more distant part which the rescuing party desired to reach.

A little after midnight the rescuers assembled again to make another attempt to reach the men, who were known to have been at work at a point about three thousand feet from the foot of South Wilkes-Barre shaft No. 3, in the Hillman vein. The tunnel in which the explosion took place, and where the fire is now raging, is only five hundred feet from the bottom of the shaft, a distance of nearly a half a mile intervening between the blazing tunnel and the place where the eight men were at work. The second attempt to reach that part of No. 3, where the victims had been employed, was supplemented with better results. The cool air that had been driven down the shaft by the great fans had cooled the passageway, and this time the rescuers reached the very point at which the men were working when the explosion took place.

Up to this time the leader of the searching party held some hope that when the chamber was reached in which they were at work, they would be secreted somewhere, or drawing substance from the many strange ways that have frequently presented themselves in the struggle for life in like accidents in the mines, and that all, or some of them might be, found alive or at least their bodies rescued. But when searchers got to the point referred to a sad discovery was made. Only the tools of the missing men were found, showing plainly that, instead of rushing toward the Stanton shaft along the very gangway over which the rescuers passed, they had undoubtedly gone in the direction of the tunnel with the certainty of being overcome with heat, smoke and gas which lay in that direction. After reaching the point where the tools were found, the rescuers pushed on a thousand feet further, a distance of forty-three hundred feet from the foot of the Stanton shaft where they entered, until they were balked by the terrible heat, which made a barrier they could not and dare not pass. It was with sad hearts that the brave little band of rescuers returned several hours later to bring up the sorry information that had been gained, and which, to the experienced miners, foretold the awful fate of the men below.

The main efforts of the officials are now being directed in the work of rescuing the bodies of the entombed men, for that all have suffered death is beyond questioning. This seems to be certain.

The rescuing party that went down the Stanton shaft yesterday morning, returned

## 1890 South Wilkes-Barre mine fire NEWS

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shortly after one o'clock without making any new discovery. They said that they advanced some distance beyond the point they reached early this morning. That they came to a point from which they could see the light of the blazing tunnel, and could proceed no farther. It was thereupon decided to return.

Along the way they made the most careful search for any trace of the missing men, but without avail. The theory held by some is that they passed into an air course, where there is a bare possibility that they may be still alive. But this hope is a meagre one, as the rescuing party found it impossible to get through this course because of the large amount of smoke and gas that filled it.

Some time after the return of the search party, Mine Inspector Williams and Superintendent Morgan, of the Stanton mine, entered the colliery alone on what is supposed to be a private investigation. They supplied themselves with lamps and had every means of communication from the subterranean chambers to the surface fully established. This would seem as if the officials named are determined to exhaust every means to rescue the men before the search is abandoned.

The Jameson home at 141 Staton street is one of indescribable misery. Yesterday was the first that Thom s went into the mine. It proved his last on earth. He was probably the one who fired the gas and his heroic attempt to save the others is outlined above. A brother of his had his leg cut off some time ago in an accident. His father, it is understood, cannot secure work, and even now a landlord's warrant is tacked on the door, the family not being able to pay the rent.—Yesterday's *Evening Leader*.

#### LATER NEWS.

At eleven o'clock last night none of the bodies were yet recovered, and it was determined that the mines should be flooded. An additional fire engine was taken to the shaft and more water pumped into it. The water from Petty's pond was also turned in and everything possible will be done to flood the mine. The flooding of the mine makes it apparent that the search for the miners will be abandoned.